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for Pius IX., who, on 8th December, 1854, without the aid of a general council, or even going through the form of consulting the bishops who by his invitation went to Rome to join in this pontifical triumph, did what neither Sixtus IV. or Alexander VII. was able to do, though he (Pius IX.) admittedly possesses no more supreme power and no greater infallibility than either of them.

No one, we think, can read the following without being convinced that Pope Alexander VII., in the year 1661, went as far as he could then venture to do, having regard to the existing state of opinions, and that if he did not define the new dogma two centuries ago, it was not from want of will, but want of power to enforce his decree, if he had ventured on a step so hazardous:—

"It is an ancient devotion of the faithful in Christ towards the most blessed mother the Virgin Mary to believe that her soul, in the first instant of its creation, was preserved exempt from the spot of original sin by a special grace and privilege, by the merits of Jesus Christ her Son, the Redeemer of the human race, and to celebrate solemnly the feast of the conception in this belief. The number of the faithful and this worship have increased since the apostolical constitution which our predecessor, Sixtus IV., of happy memory, published to recommend it, and which the Council of Trent has renewed and commanded to be observed. This devotion and worship towards the Holy Virgin has made new progress, since, with the approbation of the Roman Pontiffs, a religious order has been founded and confraternities established under this title, and indulgences have been granted to them by the Popes, so that several celebrated universities have joined themselves to this opinion, and almost all Catholics have now embraced this belief. But since, by reason of the contrary opinion, some maintained in their sermons, in their lessons of theology, and in public theses, that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived with original sin, and scandals, disputes, and dissensions offensive to God have arisen among Christian people, Paul V., of happy memory, our predecessor, forbade them to teach publicly, or to preach opinions contrary to that of which we have spoken above; and Gregory XV., also our predecessor, not being content with this prohibition, extended it to private conferences, and, moreover, ordered in favour of this same opinion that in the sacrifice of the mass, and in celebrating the divine office, both in public and private, they should use no other term than that of 'the conception.' However, as almost all the bishops of Spain, and Philip, the Catholic King of Spain, have represented to us that in that country some persons, continuing to defend the contrary opinion in spite of the aforesaid prohibitions, attack and decry, both in private and in public, the Immaculate Conception, and so interpret the privilege which the sovereign Pontiffs have granted to this devotion and festival that they destroy it altogether, and even dare to deny that the Roman Church favours this opinion and devotion, whence the disorders, scandals, and divisions, which our predecessors, Paul V. and Gregory XV., wished to prevent, continue still to this day, and there is reasonable ground to fear that this diversity of opinions may produce in future still greater evils.

"Now, we having taken into consideration that the holy Roman Church solemnly celebrates the fête of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, and that it has formerly ordained a special office for it, according to the pious, devout, and laudable institution of our predecessor Sixtus IV., and being desirous, according to the examples of the Roman Pontiffs, our predecessors, to show ourselves favourable to this laudable piety and devotion, and to this festival and worship, which has not changed in the Roman Church since its first institution, * * * * * we renew the constitutions and decrees of the Pontiffs, our predecessors, and especially those of Sixtus IV., Paul V., and Gregory XV., issued in favour of the opinion which holds that the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary in its creation, and when it was united to her body, was preserved from original sin; and likewise in favour of the festival and worship which they render to the Conception of the Virgin in consequence of this opinion." * * * * *

The Bull then goes on to prohibit preaching or publishing anything contrary to the "pious opinion," and then proceeds thus:—

"We prohibit to all sorts of persons, conformably to the constitution of Sixtus IV., to assert either that those who hold the contrary opinion, to wit, that the glorious Virgin Mary was conceived with original sin, are heretics, or that they have become guilty of mortal sin, since the Roman Church and the Holy See have not yet decided on this matter, as we now, ourselves, by no means wish or intend to decide thereupon; and even in addition to the penalties to which Sixtus IV. and other Roman Pontiffs, our predecessors, have subjected those who have dared to condemn the contrary opinion of heresy, or of mortal sin, or impiety, we subject them to still more grave punish-

ment, such as we have above imposed upon those who may violate this constitution; and it is our will that not only the bishops and prelates superior, but the local ordinaries, and even the inquisitors of heresy, wherever deputed, should proceed against, and make search for, and punish severely those who shall contravene this present constitution, whether regulars, of whatsoever order they may be, even the Company of Jesus, or ecclesiastical and secular persons, of whatever sort, state, rank, or condition soever they may be. * * * * * Given at Rome under the ring of the fisherman this 8th December, 1661, and of our Pontificate the Seventh."

We ask any intelligent Roman Catholic who is disposed to attach value to the boasted living power in the Church to decide controversies, whether this was not the time for the Pope to have shown his infallible and supreme power as Vicar and Vicegerent of Christ? and can any one believe that Alexander VII. would not have done it, if he had not well known that such an assumption would, if attempted, have proved a perfect failure, and only further fomented the strife and scandal which he desired to appease, if he had only possessed the power to do so?

If the Popes be the appointed Vicars and Vicegerents of Christ upon earth, was it not a base dereliction of duty and abdication of their Divine functions in Alexander VII. and his predecessors to allow such bitter conflicts and notorious scandals to rage within the Church for centuries, and yet deliberately to announce to the world that they did not even wish to put an end to the disputes by deciding on which side the real truth was, as Pius IX. did boldly, after the lapse of several centuries, when all dissension upon the matter had long since died out of itself among the adherents of the Church of Rome?

TRANSLATION OF A LETTER SENT IN AUGUST, 1856, TO POPE PIUS IX., BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF UTRECHT, AND THE BISHOPS OF HAARLEM AND DEVENTER.

"Most Holy Father—In the year of the incarnation of our Lord, 1854, on the 8th December, was solemnly proclaimed by your Holiness, in St. Peter's, the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin, mother of our Redeemer, as though it were a dogma of the Christian faith. We are unable to express how very greatly this circumstance has astonished, nay even afflicted us. We shall probably be blamed for having so long deferred expressing our sentiments upon this extraordinary event. The orthodox faith of the Church of Utrecht is more than sufficiently known throughout the Catholic world. That this Church should directly, and at once, have rejected the new and false doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the most Holy Virgin Mary is, doubtless, the sentiment of all true Catholics, but, in her opinion, this feeling is not a reason strong enough to withhold her from openly opposing it now. Indeed, that we should openly repudiate and oppose it is due alike to the dignity of our office, to the Catholic faith, and to defenders of the truth.

"We should consider ourselves as unfaithful to our duty if we remained longer silent on this subject. The true faith, in which, from our very infancy, we have been instructed, forbids us to be silent. However unworthy we may be of the office we hold, it is our bounden duty to publish to the eye and ear of the Catholic Church our sentiments respecting these events. We are fully convinced that nothing can be added to or taken away from the faith once delivered to the saints. To us, as bishops of the Catholic Church, is committed the undefiled keeping of that faith. 'That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep,' so wrote Paul the Apostle to his dearly beloved son, Timothy. Then St. Vincent of Lerins considers this as not addressed to Timothy alone—as many prelates as would succeed Timothy in the aforesaid character must consider these words as addressed to themselves. The opinion respecting the immaculate conception of our Lord's mother, Mary, publicly and solemnly proclaimed, would increase that faith once so delivered. Prior to the 11th century of the birth of Christ such a privilege of the blessed Virgin has never and nowhere been known. Whether we turn to the Eastern or to the Western Church, and question both parts of the Catholic world, not the least trace of such a sentiment is to be found before the above stated period. Whether we address the popes, your predecessors, before the aforesaid century, we are fully convinced that such a sentiment was not felt by either of them. It would even be easy for us to point out instances of their contrary mode of thinking. Let us listen to what Innocent III. and V., and to what Clement VI. says: 'We could easily quote passages from the Holy Scriptures which are diametrically in contradiction with the new doctrine. Therefore out of these two sources, of God's Word and tradition, nothing can be extracted in favour of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin mother of our Lord. Therefore, for the keeping of the deposit of faith, we exclaim with a loud voice against this doctrine; affirming that it is branded on the forehead with the mark 'novelty.' This first and important motive prompts us to express our sentiments upon this subject.

"Neither were those bishops of the Catholic Church at liberty to express their sentiments upon this doctrine; and this is the second complaint which we have to bring before your Holiness. The office of judge belongs to all the bishops—that

peculiar privilege of the episcopal character is here in no wise regarded; no regard has been had to the opinion of the prelates as a body; no ear has been lent to the voices of their churches, but simply from the voices of those who went to Rome was any sentiment heard upon this subject. And assuredly the right of judgment is a privilege due to the bishops. The Council of Jerusalem, the first and the pattern of all synods, evidently grants them this right. After the Head of the Apostles, St. Peter, had spoken, St. James stood up, saying: 'My sentence is, Acts xv. 19. Now, what bishops (as the successors and substitutes of the Apostles) were in office when you proclaimed this new doctrine? They were, for a certainty, either stupid, dumb witnesses, or else base flatterers—therefore with what contempt is the episcopal dignity treated in an apparently respectable conclave! no dauntless sentinel was to be seen at his post. Most holy father, with your leave be it said, in order to raise the Head higher than it should be the most illustrious members of the body have been crushed. Thanks to heaven, we have not yet forgotten the rank we hold, and we therefore complain to you of the injustice done to us respecting it.

"We are urged by a third reason, viz., charity towards our Church, to reject the fabulous dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin. This charity demands our utmost care to guard her free from all false doctrines. Thanks to heaven, the faith of our Church has remained undefiled until the present day; though her foundations, in this country, have frequently been shaken. We consider it as our duty to remove from her all innovations respecting the truth of her faith. For the last three years a confusion has intruded itself into the ecclesiastical ordinances in this country, therefore our faith is in danger of being polluted, and it is our object to prevent this danger. We must endeavour, by all possible means, to present that Church as a pure bride to Jesus. To bequeath the faith of our forefathers as simple and pure to our posterity as we have received it from our ancestors is with us an object of great importance. Rejecting every innovation, and attached to ancient rites, we thus, with Tertullian, sue to separate the true doctrine from the false: 'What was first delivered came undeniably from God, and is truth; that which has been introduced at a later period is foreign and false' (Lib. de Præser, cap. 31). This exhortation is directed to ourselves just as much as to Timothy by the teacher of the Gentiles, viz., to 'avoid profane and vain babblings' (1 Tim. vi. 20). The innovation of words, that is, of doctrine, things, and opinions which are contrary to olden times: 'Should such innovations be adopted, why then the faith of our blessed forefathers must necessarily be entirely, or for the most part, violated.' These are the words of St. Vincent of Lerins (Commonit. c. 24).

"About 200 years ago, the ambassador of the Spanish king, Philip IV., requested in his master's name, that your predecessor Alexander the VII. should give him a positive answer respecting the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin. This prelate addressed the following questions to Cardinal Bona: whether he could decide this difference? 'That neither the Pope himself, nor the Church, was able to establish new articles of faith; but only declare what God may have revealed to His Church, after the traditions handed down to us by the Apostles were duly examined, down to the present time. Such was the answer of that pious and learned Cardinal. 'Should I not,' repeated the Pope, 'by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, be able to determine what ought to be your opinion respecting this difference?' 'To you, and you only, most holy father, could anything revealed unto you from God be of any service. From this it is not to be inferred that you could be at liberty to oblige the faithful and myself to accept your verdict.' Such were the reasonings of Bona. O may this most wise, most genuine catholic sentiment, be embraced by all the successors of St. Peter. We have considered it not only an honour, but also a duty on our part to offer to your Holiness our Pastoral Instruction, which we forward to you with this letter; and in order that the Catholics of the Netherlands, and more especially in our own parishes, should be better acquainted with what they should think of this new doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin, we have published it in the language of the country. Our Church has repeatedly expressed a desire for a General Council, and it appears that it is now needful to repeat this appeal. On account of a violation of the pledge of faith, and on account of the injustice committed towards Episcopacy, at the time the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin Mary, mother of our Saviour, was established, as though this were a Divine revelation, we retain the right of making an appeal, when time and opportunity present, to a future General Council. May the Father of light open the eyes of our heart, and work in us that which is well pleasing in His sight. With the most profound respect, we the undersigned are, most Holy Father,

Your Holiness's most humble servants,

(Signed)

JOHN, Archbishop of Utrecht,
HENRY JOHN, Bishop of Haarlem,
HERMAN, Bishop of Deventer.

Correspondence.

ON THE INVOCATION OF SAINTS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

SIR,—As a good action cannot be too often repeated, allow me to refer you again to CATHOLIC LAYMAN for June, 1854, page 71, column 1, where you insinuate that it is not practically true that Catholics say, when addressing God, "Have mercy on us; forgive us our sins;" and, when addressing the Blessed Virgin or saints, "Pray for us"—which is in plain English to maintain that we pray to the saints to have mercy on us; to forgive us our sins, and that we give them the adoration and worship which is justly and exclusively due to God. This is precisely the charge

* They allude to the Papal allocation of 1853, so nobly resisted by the Protestants in Holland.—Ed.